

# A PREZ RELEASE

## from AGTS

*(Monthly commentary from the President of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary)*

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### **USA TODAY, A Snag in the Net and the prophetic voice of U2**

I spend a lot of a time on airplanes. When you live in Springfield, Missouri, that means that the first leg of every flight is an hour (or so) hop in a very compact version of a modern jetliner to the airline hub city from which you will connect with your destination. I have a ritual when I fly and that is that first leg out of Springfield is always given to reading the daily edition of USA TODAY. I find terse articles on a variety of issues that don't make it into local news and I inevitably tear out articles that have struck my interest for further study and evaluation.

A recent edition of USA TODAY carried an article about a college senior at Northwestern University. This student is developing the world's largest searchable database for porn videos. I was struck by this student's casual view of his goal of indexing the 100,000 porn titles in circulation. In a statement that made a weak attempt at amorality he said, ". . . if it's legal and somebody wants to see it, I'm not going to play censor here." His "stylish" non-judgmental perspective went on further to defend his business venture by saying, "I'm realistic about what I do . . . I'm not going to compare myself with Mother Teresa here. It's not something I want to do the rest of my life, but I'm 21 . . . I'm allowed to be debauchorous." While admitting his ultimate goal was money, (I predict this IPO will make this guy big bucks) his version of "virtual morality" was summed up when he concluded, "I take a lot of pride in having shaped this abstract idea into a profitable company."

There you have it. This is as clear a picture of current western society as I've seen in a long time. If a product is legal and there's market for it, then regardless of the sickness it may represent, the violence it may engender and the destruction it may cause in human lives, we're encouraged to chill out and not be so judgmental. The ultimate defense is . . . Hey guys I'm only 21 . . . cut me some slack . . . I'm allowed a little bit of debauchery in my life.

I'm not angry with this student, I am left numb by what his statements resonate.

Consumerism has produced a powerful god out of a mere idol. Just like the silversmiths in Ephesus (Acts 19:24-30 ) any perceived challenge to the almighty dollar is viewed as either a joke or ultimately responded to with vehemence.

While I was sitting there and wondering how I would connect with this student if we were to ever meet, I happened to see another article across the page about the Irish rock band U2. While I'm not a fan or a student of rock bands I do know that our culture views them as almost prophetic. The views reflected in the music of this band from Dublin provide another window on this world. (I just think it makes sense to get inside the mind of people who influence masses of people around the world. Bands like U2, whether you like it or not, represent the "zeitgeist", the fabric of culture). I read the article about the band's new CD and how it was their current journey on the road to "transcendence." The last sentence in the article literally flew off the page as the lead singer Bono commented that music was a way to express feelings words couldn't convey, while waiting for God to walk through the door, . . . because in the end craft (music) is not enough.

So I went to the music store and looked at some U2 lyrics and listened to them sing those haunting cries for transcendence. Their storied search for what they still hadn't found was written all over these lyrics. Honest, strident and penetrating words jumped out at me:

*"Heaven on earth we need it now. I'm sick of all of this hanging around . . . Sick of sorrow and sick of pain . . . Sick of hearing again and again that there's gonna be peace on earth."*

*"And I know it aches and your heart it breaks . . . Leave it behind, you've got to leave it behind, all that you fashion, all that you make, all that you build, all that you break, all that you measure all that you steal all this you can leave behind."*

I listened to lyrics that represented a painful search, but a journey that was honest and not willing to settle for making a buyout of porno web-site to the IPO vultures the validation for life. So on that little trip from Springfield to Memphis, the Spirit of God convicted me of my laziness. The Lord uncovered the ease with which I lopped all the folks "outside the fold" into one large cauldron of decadence and dealt with them in the same manner I use the "delete" button on my computer.

If you read this entire article you might be asking, what's a seminary president doing getting into discussions about porn websites and rockbands? You might be saying, I thought you trained ministers at AGTS. If we were to meet face to face and we were to talk about this article, here's what I would say. (humbly) This world is in a mode to self-destruct. Some people are quite happy about participating in their own self destruction, but there are hungry hearts everywhere, . . . even in big name rock bands like U2. **If the Gospel that can**

**transform hearts and rearrange dysfunctional societies is going to have a hearing in this world, we, who have been recipients of God's grace, must do more than lob Gospel bullets at people.** I am utterly convinced of the reality of the power of God to transform lives. I am also of the persuasion that human beings are objects of God's love. If Jesus died for them, then I can make minimal attempts at trying to understand their longings and perspectives on this world. It's simply an example that Jesus shows us in the John 4 account of his encounter with the Samaritan women at the well. She was not just a target for the Truth He spoke and embodied; she was a human being made in the image of God whose broken life spoke of despair, illicit love and a limited view of God. His attempts to connect His solution to her problem took time to hear her story so that the Truth He presented had a fair chance of making sense to this lady and would result in a person set free.

So as seminary president, I envision a process where leaders will emerge who are radically committed to the transforming power of Jesus Christ. But like any athlete who trains for an event or sport, you hope that when you step to the blocks to run the 100 meter dash you're not told that you are actually competing in Greco Roman wrestling.

It's that way in ministry to a needy world. Make sure you are prepared to face the porn-site developers whose morality is based on making a buck legally. Also be ready to engage the honest search for transcendence by U2 fans.

Are you prepared????

Byron D. Klaus  
[agtspres@agseminary.edu](mailto:agtspres@agseminary.edu)

## **Check it out. . .**

Our **Leadership Roundtable 2000** in St. Louis was of great benefit to pastoral leaders across the nation. All of the sessions are available on audio tape. The cost is \$2.50 per session or \$15.00 for the entire set (seven tapes). If interested, please contact Jackie at [jeutsler@agseminary.edu](mailto:jeutsler@agseminary.edu), call 1-800-467-2487 or mail your check to the **AGTS Development Office, ATTN: Roundtable 2000, 1435 N. Glenstone, Springfield, MO 65802**. Sessions available: *Ray Berryhill, Alton Garrison, Paul Grabill, Ron McManus, Doug Oss, George Wood and the Panel Discussion.*

In the ongoing critique of **Willow Creek Community Church's** influence on the church in North America, an entire feature section is offered in the November 13, 2000, issue of Christianity Today. Of particular interest is the article by Michael Hamilton entitled "Willow Creek's Place in History."